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ABSTRACT

Since clauses are the largest functional components of a sentence, their analysis can increase attention to sentence structure and stylistic variation. Students can learn to distinguish main clause types by naming the verb forms used (transitive, intransitive, equational, and passive). Once students have mastered the recognition of main clauses, they are ready for the next stylistic level, identifying both the form and function of dependent clauses. Discussion of the subordination process leads to consideration of two other important stylistic options, sentence complexity (the ratio of dependent clauses per main clause) and sentence length (the number of clauses per sentence). After analyzing and experimenting with main and dependent clauses, writing students are ready to analyze prose passages written by exemplary writers, peers, and themselves. This focuses attention on similar stylistic options. Illustrative analyses of prose written by F. Scott Fitzgerald and by college students show that writing students develop a strong sense of verb choice and sentence structure variability through the clause analysis process. They also learn the necessity of evaluating their writing style with each draft that they compose. (RL)

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Developing Style through Clause Analysis: A Linguistic Approach to Composition

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In a typical college composition class, instructors face a range of student writing abilities. At one end of the spectrum are those students whose prose is characterized by ungrammatical sentences; at the other end are those students whose prose is grammatically correct but lacks little or no syntactical variation. How can we raise the writing levels of such a heterogeneous class without catering to one end of the spectrum and ignoring the other end? How can we develop our students' awareness of what a grammatically complete sentence is and at the same time develop their awareness of flexibility in sentence structure? An approach I have used the last few years in my college composition courses is clause analysis, a model which describes written language structure by focusing on the form and function of main and dependent clauses. In my classroom instruction I aim to develop students' abilities to recognize and experiment with the forms and functions of clause types. Once students master this level, they are ready to make analyses of descriptive, narrative, and expository prose samples, as well as analyses of their own writing styles.

The Method

Because clauses are the largest functional components of a sentence and operate at the sentence level, I make use of clause analysis as the basis for the presentation of sentence structure and stylistic variation. In this procedure the verb is viewed as central to the clause, as well as to the sentence; therefore, recognition of sentence forms (transitive, intransitive, equational, passive) is based on developing students'

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abilities to name the verb form in main clauses. I also ask that students be able to distinguish main clauses from any other word groups, so that emphasis is first placed on recognition of grammatically complete expressions of ideas (centering around the subject and a finite verb structure), as opposed to ungrammatical expressions. For example, I might ask them to tell me which of the following groups of words constitutes a main clause:

(1) Running down the street.
(2) The robber is running down the street.
(3) The robber down the street.

Because (1) lacks a finite verb, as well as mention of a performer of an action, and because (3) lacks a verb, these two groups of words do not qualify as main clauses. Group (2) has the subject-verb core necessary for a grammatically complete main clause.

Since there are only four possible clause types in English, all main clauses are necessarily labeled as either transitive, intransitive, equational, or passive. I discuss the structural differences among these clause types. Transitive clauses are goal-directed: there is a recipient of an action or process. The intransitive clause may express complete predication as in, "She is laughing"; or it may take adverbial adjuncts of time, manner, location, purpose, cause, result condition, concession, or comparison. Equational verbs, verbs of the senses, as well as forms of the verbs to be, to get, to become, to grow, to remain, and to appear (also known as linking verbs or copula) connect the subject of the sentence to a noun phrase or to an adjective or to adverbs of place. Passive verbs are derivatives of transitive verbs and are generally used if the receiver of an action in a transitive sentence is more important than the performer of an action; if the performer of an action is unknown or unimportant; or if the effects of an action are more important than the process of an action as in, "The room was papered a dull yellow." But in transitive and passive clauses there is named or understood an agent, an action, and a goal or recipient of an action.

I am not just concerned with developing students' abilities to label the form of clauses (transitive, intransitive, equational, passive), but also with their abilities to discuss differences in meaning conveyed through verb choice--one aspect of stylistic flexibility. In an attempt to broaden the traditional definition of a verb as a word which expresses action or state of being, I discuss the various meanings verbs may express: emotions, sensations, volitions, cognitions, physical action, possession, location, states of being and condition, and changes in states of being or condition. I point up, for example, there is a difference in meaning between writing "There is smoke in the room" and "Smoke permeates the room." The first main clause (an equational clause) expresses static description; the second (a transitive clause) expresses process description. Verb choice, then, is one of the important options a writer makes in communicating meaning.

Once students have mastered the recognition of main clauses according to their form, they are ready for the next stylistic level--the identification of both the form and function of dependent clauses. At this level students advance from working with simple sentence structures (main clauses in simple and compound sentences) to more structurally complex sentences (complex and compound-complex sentences) which are created and defined according to the subordination of dependent clauses to main clauses. Although dependent clauses are like main clauses in their subject-verb core and can be labeled as transitive, intransitive, equational, or passive, they have the additional ability of assuming nominal, adjectival, or adverbial functions in sentences. I discusss varying the structure of information in sentences by subordinating dependent clauses in various positions in sentences, and I ask students to analyze the form and function of dependent clauses in sentences. In the sentence "That she is guilty is obvious," I ask the students to determine what the dependent clauses is and how it functions. "That she is guilty" is an equational dependent clause functioning as the subject of "is obvious." However, in a structural

variation of that same sentence, "It is obvious that she is guilty," the dependent equational clause "that she is guilty" functions as a subject complement. By analyzing how and where dependent clauses function in sentences, the class begins to understand the numerous options available to them in their sentence patterns.

Discussion of the process of subordination leads the class into consideration of two other important stylistic options--sentence complexity (defined according to clause analysis as the ratio of dependent clauses per main clause) and sentence length (the number of clauses per sentence). We experiment with expressing ideas in main clauses (simple or compound sentences) and in main and dependent clauses (complex and compound-complex sentences); we experiment with periodic and cumulative sentence structures so that a sense of sentence flexibility and variations in the density of information conveyed in a sentence is developed. I point up, as well, that sentence length and degree of subordination do not necessarily correspond; that is, a sentence may be very long, comprised of perhaps eight clauses per sentence, but it does not have to be structurally complex. It does not have to be a compound-complex sentence; it could be composed of only one or more main clauses. Because so much of punctuation usage centers around separation of main clauses or of dependent clauses from main clauses, I find this an opportune time to talk about punctuation, such as the use of a comma after introductory dependent clauses or the use of the semicolon to separate main clauses.

Application of the Method to Prose Analysis

After analyzing and experimenting with main and dependent clauses, the class is ready to analyze prose passages from exemplary writers and then to analyze their own or their peers' writing styles. In examining exemplary writers' prose we discuss the form of main clauses, the form and function of dependent clauses, sentence length, and sentence complexity in an effort to understand how all these options reflect the content of a sample. In examining students' prose samples, the objective is to focus attention on similar stylistic options:

What is good about the student sample? What options could he further exercise and what would be the effects of such options?

In the clause analysis of a prose sample, students are given written samples and are then asked to segregate and re-write one clause to a line. (The primary source-model underlying the content of this grammatical system is that elaborated by Walter A. Cook in Introduction to Tagmemic Analysis [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969] and by Louis Arena in Linguistics and Composition: A Method to Improve Expository Writing Skills [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1975]. I am indebted to Louis Arena for allowing me to incorporate his procedures and codes into this paper.) Once clauses have been labeled according to their form (Code 1, Appendix), dependent and partial (non-finite) clauses are further labeled according to their function within a sentence, i.e., nominal, adjectival, or adverbial (Codes 2 and 3). After segregating and labeling clauses in individual samples, whole sentences are marked according to their structures--simple, compound, complex, compound-complex. A summary sheet may be compiled for a sample which presents the frequency of clause types and sentence types. Style complexity is based on the average number of clauses per sentence and the average number of dependent clauses per main clause.

A sample passage from The Great Gatsby, a description of Gatsby's party (The Great Gatsby in Three Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, ed., Malcolm Cowley [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950], p.32), illustrates clause analysis procedure and the results of this method, calculated in the summary following the analysis:

1.	# The bar is in full swing,	eCl
2.	and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside,	+tCl
3.	until the air is alive with chatter and laughter and casual innuendo and introductions (4) and enthusiastic meetings between women (5)	T-eCl
4.	forgotten on the spot	Aj-pCl part
5.	who never knew each other's names.# C-C	Aj-tCl rel

6. The lights grow brighter		eCl
7. as the earth lurches away from the sun,		T-iCl
8. and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music,		+tCl
9. and the opera of voices pitches a key higher.#	C-C	+iCl
10.# Laughter is easier minute by minute,		eCl
11. spilled with prodigality,		Aj-pCl part
12. tipped out at a cheerful word.#	Cpx	Aj-pCl part

Totals:

3 Sentences	6 Main Clauses	2	tCl	1	iCl	3	eCl	0 pCl
12 Clauses	6 Dependent	1	tCl	1	iCl	1	eCl	3 pCl

0 Simple Sentences	1 Complex Sentences
0 Compound Sentences	2 Compound Sentences
	3 Cpx + C-C sentences

Average Number of Clauses per Sentence:	4.00	
Dependent Clauses per Main Clause:	1.00	
Dependent Clauses per Cpx or C-C Sentence:	2.00	
Most Frequently Used Clause Type:	eCl	33.3%
Second Most Frequently Used Clause Type:	tCl	25.0%
Third Most Frequently Used Clause Type:	pCl	25.0%
Fourth Most Frequently Used Clause Type:	iCl	16.6%

In this sample the fact that there is a higher frequency of occurrence of equational clauses is not unusual in descriptive writing, since equational verbs take adjectves and indicate state of being or change of state of being as in Clause 6, "The lights grow brighter." Process transitive and intransitive verbs add a sense of movement to this description as,for example,in Clause 2, "and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside." Amplifying the feeling of movement are dependent time clauses which suggest expansion in time (Clause 3) and simultaneity of actions (Clause 7). Dependent adjectival clauses, 4,5,11,12, typical of descriptive prose, specify nouns in Clause 3 and in Clause 10, so that we have a more concrete image of what kinds of activities are taking place. Fitzgerald prefers complex sentence structures in order to imitate continual movement in time: sequential dependent clauses reinforce this as, for example,in the last two dependent clauses following Clause 10.

That clause analysis causes students to evaluate their own prose either through peer evaluation or through self-evaluation is demonstrated in the following analyzed passage. This passage is part of a student's original draft of a paper defining the abstraction "motivation":

1. #	There must be some sort of an incentive.#	S	eCl
2. #	This incentive could be most anything.#	S	eCl
3. #	It may be just for mental satisfaction		eCl
4.	or it can be a cookie or a new car.#	C	+eCl
5.#	There must be an incentive.#	S	eCl
6.#	This starts us.#	S	tCl
7.#	Incentives (8) are usually our strongest motivators.#		eCl
8.	that we set up	Cpx	Aj-tCl
9.#	These may be our desires		eCl
10.	to complete something, such as a painting or a wood project.#	Cpx	Aj-tCl inf.
11.#	A new job or that promotion may be an incentive too.#	S	eCl

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Totals:

8 Sentences	9 Main Clauses	1 tCl	0 iCl	8 eCl	0 pCl
11 Clauses	2 Dependent	2 tCl	0 iCl	0 eCl	0 pCl

5 Simple Sentences
1 Compound Sentence
2 Complex Sentences
0 Compound-Complex Sentences
2 Cpx + C-C Sentences

Average number of clauses per sentence:	1.37	
Dependent Clauses per main clause:	.22	
Dependent Clauses per Cpx or C-C Sentence:	1.00	
Most frequently used clause type:	eCl	72.7%
Second most frequently used clause type:	tCl	27.2%
Third most frequently used clause type:	iCl	0%
Least used clause type:	pCl	0%

By breaking down the student's sample, his peers could make observations and suggestions about the writing. Specifically, they noted the student's prose reveals a strong predilection for main clauses: there are 9 main clauses and 2 dependent clauses. Clauses 1 through 6 could all be integrated to form

a complex sentence, since all six clauses discuss what incentive is; subordination would also rid the paper of its primer sentences. There is, as well, a preference for descriptive equational verbs. The class suggested that instead of describing "motivation" in equational verbs, the student should consider making use of more action transitive and intransitive verbs to specify what causes motivation and how it works or operates. . To vary sentence structure, students suggested subordinating dependent clauses of purpose, cause, and result, all of which would, also, specify how motivation operates.

Reflecting these recommendations is the student's revised version of the preceding sample in which he exhibits greater use of subordination and action verbs to define motivation:

1.#	Motivation is the force within us		eCl
2.	which **stimulates** us		Aj-tCl
3.	to go ahead with a project.#	Cpx	P-iCl
4.#	A person may be incited by tangible goals, such as money, or intangible goals, such as personal satisfaction,		pCl
5.	but in either case these incentives encourage us		+tCl
6.	to complete a project or		P-tCl
7	to better ourselves." #	C-C	P-tCl

In this revision,11 clauses have been reduced to 7 clauses expressed in complex sentence structures. Evident is greater emphasis on dependent purpose clauses and on action verbs, all of which elaborate on the general statement that "Motivation is the force within us...."

As demonstrated in the revised student sample, students develop a strong sense of verb choice and sentence structure options in the clause analysis process. They also learn that they should evaluate their own style in each draft of a paper; they should not rely on the "way things turn out" the first time they write. Initially, as in the student sample, I find students relying on forms of the verb "to be," "to have," and "to get." Gradually, though, they begin to experiment with other verb types and they begin to see better the relationships between or among ideas in sentences. Clause analysis enables

the instructor, I believe, to teach aspects of grammar and its relevance to sentence patterns. By involving students in the act of analyzing their own prose styles, students become aware of how they write and how they may vary or improve their styles. Most of all, they learn that as writers they have numerous options to consider in the process of composing.

APPENDIX

CODES AND SUMMARY FOR CLAUSE ANALYSIS

CODE 1: Labels to be affixed to all clauses of the text in order to mark their form.

iCl=intransitive clause
tCl=transitive clause
eCl=equational clause
pCl=passive clause

CODE 2: Labels to mark dependent clauses according to function.

S.V.=subject of verb
S.C.=subject complement
D.O.=direct object
I.O.=indirect object
O.C.=object complement
O.P.=object of preposition
H.A.=head word appositive
Aj=adjectival
T=time
L=location
M=manner
P=purpose
C=cause
R=result
Cs=concession
Cm=comparative
Cn=conditional

CODE 3: Subscript form labels used to mark nominal, adjectival, and adverbial clauses.

rel= relative clause
inf= marked infinitive
unm= unmarked infinitive
part= participle clause

CODE 4: Miscellaneous codes employed in clause analysis.

S=simple sentence
Cpx= complex sentence
C= compound sentence
C-C=compound-complex sentence
+=sequential independent clause
#=sentence boundary marker
#P#=paragraph initial marker

SUMMARY SHEET

__sentences ___main clauses __tCl __iCl __eCl __pCl
__clauses ___dependent clauses __tCl __iCl __eCl __pCl

__simple sentences __complex sentences
__compound sentences __compound-complex sentences
Total___complex + C-C sentences

___Average number of clauses
___Average number of dependent clauses per main clause
___Average number of dependent clauses per complex or C-C sentence

Most frequently used clause type: ____%
Second most frequently used clause type: ___%
Third most frequently used clause type: ___%
Fourth most frequently used clause type: ___%